

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF IOWA
WESTERN DIVISION**

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

Plaintiff,

vs.

JASON JOHN EHLER,

Defendant.

No. CR00-4024-MWB

**ORDER REGARDING MOTION
FOR SENTENCE REDUCTION
PURSUANT TO
18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2)**

This matter comes before the court on its own motion under 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2).¹

The United States Sentencing Commission recently revised the United States Sentencing Guidelines (“USSG”) applicable to drug trafficking offenses by changing how the base offense levels in the drug quantity tables incorporate the statutory mandatory minimum penalties for such offenses. Specifically, Amendment 782 (subject to subsection (e)(1)) generally reduces by two levels the offense levels assigned to the quantities that trigger the statutory mandatory minimum penalties in USSG §2D1.1 and made parallel changes to USSG §2D1.11. Because Amendment 782 (subject to subsection (e)(1)) alters

¹ In light of the record, the court concludes that it need not appoint counsel or conduct a hearing. *See United States v. Harris*, 568 F.3d 666, 669 (8th Cir. 2009) (concluding that there is no right to assistance of counsel when pursuing relief under 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c) and finding that a judge need not hold a hearing on a motion pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)); *see also United States v. Burrell*, 622 F.3d 961, 966 (8th Cir. 2010) (clarifying that “[a]ll that is required is enough explanation of the court’s reasoning to allow for meaningful appellate review”); Fed. R. Crim. P. 43(b)(4) (stating that a defendant’s presence is not required in a proceeding that involves the reduction of a sentence under 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)).

the threshold amounts in the drug quantity tables in USSG §2D1.1 and USSG §2D1.11, many, but not all, drug quantities will have a base offense level that is two levels lower than before Amendment 782 (subject to subsection (e)(1)).

The court is statutorily precluded from applying a federal sentencing guideline amendment retroactively unless the United States Sentencing Commission designates an amendment for retroactive application. In relevant part, 18 U.S.C. § 3582 provides:

The court may not modify a term of imprisonment once it has been imposed except that . . . in the case of a defendant who has been sentenced to a term of imprisonment based on a sentencing range that has subsequently been lowered by the Sentencing Commission pursuant to 28 U.S.C. [§] 994(o), upon motion of the defendant or the Director of the Bureau of Prisons, or on its own motion, the court may reduce the term of imprisonment, after considering the factors set forth in [18 U.S.C. §] 3553(a) to the extent that they are applicable, if such a reduction is consistent with applicable policy statements issued by the Sentencing Commission.

18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2); *see also* *Dillon v. United States*, 560 U.S. 817, 826 (2010) (“Section 3582(c)(2)’s text, together with its narrow scope, shows that Congress intended to authorize only a limited adjustment to an otherwise final sentence and not a plenary resentencing proceeding.”); *United States v. Auman*, 8 F.3d 1268, 1271 (8th Cir. 1993) (“Section 3582(c)(2) is a provision that permits a district court to reduce a term of imprisonment if the sentencing range upon which the term was based is subsequently lowered by the Sentencing Commission.”).

The United States Sentencing Commission promulgated USSG §1B1.10 to implement 28 U.S.C. § 994(u) and to provide guidance to a court when considering a motion under 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2). In relevant part, USSG §1B1.10 states:

In a case in which a defendant is serving a term of imprisonment, and the guideline range applicable to that defendant has subsequently been lowered as a result of an amendment to the Guidelines Manual listed in subsection (d)

below, the court may reduce the defendant's term of imprisonment as provided by 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2). As required by 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2), any such reduction in the defendant's term of imprisonment shall be consistent with this policy statement.

USSG §1B1.10(a)(1); *see also* USSG §1B1.10, comment. (n.1) (“Eligibility for consideration under 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2) is triggered only by an amendment listed in subsection (d) that lowers the applicable guideline range”). In addition to specifying which federal sentencing guidelines may be retroactively applied, USSG §1B1.10 guides the court as to the amount by which a sentence may be reduced under 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2). *See* USSG §1B1.10(b)(1).

On July 18, 2014, the United States Sentencing Commission unanimously voted to apply Amendment 782 (subject to subsection (e)(1)) retroactively to most drug trafficking offenses, and it set November 1, 2014 as the date that Amendment 782 (subject to subsection (e)(1)) would go into effect. Stated differently, Amendment 782 (subject to subsection (e)(1)) is included within subsection (d) of USSG §1B1.10. Consequently, under 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2) and USSG §1B1.10, the court may rely on Amendment 782 (subject to subsection (e)(1)) to reduce a defendant's sentence. But, even if Amendment 782 (subject to subsection (e)(1)) is applicable, a special limiting instruction applies: “The court shall not order a reduced term of imprisonment based on Amendment 782 unless the effective date of the court's order is November 1, 2015, or later.” USSG §1B1.10(e)(1); *see also* Amendment 788 (amending USSG §1B1.10).

At the defendant's sentencing, the court calculated a total adjusted offense level of 37 and a criminal history category of IV. Such offense level and criminal history correspond to a sentencing guideline range of 292 to 365 months imprisonment. After relying on USSG §4A1.3 to depart downward to criminal history category III and relying on USSG §5G1.3(b) to depart downward by 35 months imprisonment, the court calculated a sentencing guideline range of 227 to 292 months imprisonment. The court sentenced the

defendant to 227 months imprisonment. After applying Amendment 782 (subject to subsection (e)(1)), the defendant faces a total adjusted offense level of 35 and a criminal history category of IV. Such offense level and criminal history correspond to an amended sentencing guideline range of 235 to 293 months imprisonment. The bottom of the amended sentencing guideline range is higher than the sentence that the court imposed, that is, 227 months imprisonment. So, as a result of the court departing downward, the defendant received a greater benefit, that is, a sentence below the amended sentencing guideline range.

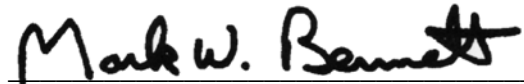
In sum, the court is unable to rely on Amendment 782 (subject to subsection (e)(1)) to reduce the defendant's sentence under 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2) and USSG §1B1.10. *See generally United States v. Curry*, 584 F.3d 1102, 1104 (8th Cir. 2009) (discussing *United States v. Wyatt*, 115 F.3d 606, 608-09 (8th Cir. 1997)) (explaining requirements under USSG §1B1.10(b)). Because the court imposed a term of imprisonment outside the guideline range applicable to the defendant at the time of sentencing as a result of a downward departure pursuant to USSG §4A1.3 and a downward departure pursuant to USSG §5G1.3, the court is unable to reduce the defendant's sentence. *See* USSG §1B1.10(b)(2)(A) ("Except as provided in subdivision (B), the court shall not reduce the defendant's term of imprisonment under 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2) and this policy statement to a term that is less than the minimum of the amended guideline range determined under subdivision (1) of this subsection."); USSG §1B1.10, comment. (n.3) (making clear that a reduction is not authorized under 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2) if the court imposed a term of imprisonment outside the guideline range applicable to the defendant at the time of sentencing as a result of a downward departure or variance and such term is less than the minimum term of imprisonment provided by the amended guideline range); *see also United States v. Anderson*, 686 F.3d 585, 588-90 (8th Cir. 2012) (noting that not all downward departures and variances that applied to the original sentence are available under 18

U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2)); *United States v. Maxwell*, 590 F.3d 585, 588 (8th Cir. 2010) (discussing USSG §1B1.10(b)(2)(A)); *United States v. Higgins*, 584 F.3d 770, 772 (8th Cir. 2009) (same); *United States v. Murphy*, 578 F.3d 719, 721 (8th Cir. 2009) (same); *United States v. Wagner*, 563 F.3d 680, 682 (8th Cir. 2009) (emphasizing that the authority to reduce a sentence is constrained by USSG §1B1.10(b)(2)(A)).

Accordingly, the court concludes that a reduction under 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2) and USSG §1B1.10 is not justified. The clerk's office is directed to send a copy of this order to the defendant, the office of the Federal Public Defender, the office of the United States Attorney and the office of United States Probation.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

DATED this 7th day of April, 2015.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark W. Bennett". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

MARK W. BENNETT
U. S. DISTRICT COURT JUDGE
NORTHERN DISTRICT OF IOWA